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SELLING A BUILDING CAMPAIGN

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Muskegon, Michigan, is a city which has grown so rapidly in the last ten years that it is difficult to estimate its population. Conservative figures, however, place it at 40,000. This is borne out by the school census which is, in round numbers, 9,000. Muskegon, however, is a typical city and the problems, with slight variations, which one meets here are common to almost every city of its size in the same geographical location. It is primarily and distinctly of the industrial type.

In one way, however, education in Muskegon has been very unique. In 1895, Mr. Charles Hackley gave the Hackley Manual Training School and endowed it for \$600,000. Later he created the Julia E. Hackley Educational Fund which amounts to \$1,100,000. These gifts together with others he made to the public library and art gallery, which are under the control of the Board of Education, make the endowment amount to about \$2,000,000. When the estate is settled, it is expected that the total endowment will be about \$3,000,000. For this reason, it has been possible in the past to do many things in Muskegon, which were not at that time commonly accomplished by cities of this size, without taxing the citizens for their support.

The conditions produced by the war, however, and the consequent increase of the cost of conducting schools in respect to both maintenance and construction have taken up so much of the endowment fund that little is left to carry on the special outside activities. Seven years ago, for example, it was proposed by the Board of Education to erect a new high school costing in the neighborhood of \$300,000, to pay the interest on the bonds, and to create a sinking fund for the retirement of the bonds from the proceeds of the endowment. This meant that the high school would not cost the taxpayers of this city anything. The matter was submitted to the people and by a very small vote was carried. Later a new element appeared upon the Board of Education, a re-survey of the situation

was made, and it was decided to postpone building. Of course, by waiting, the Board of Education found itself face to face with the problem of being unable to build during the war period.

In the meanwhile, junior high schools had been rapidly developing in Michigan and other points of the middle west and the junior college, in some degree at least, had become popular.

Upon the signing of the armistice, the Board of Education undertook again the problem of building a new high school. Little headway was made and for several months the matter dragged. However, in September, 1919, the superintendent of schools prepared a careful study of conditions which bear upon the erection of school buildings in Muskegon, and presented data showing the rate of increase over a period of six years. The result of the consideration of this study was that the Board of Education definitely committed itself to build a new senior high school and junior college, a new junior high-school building and a new grade building, all of which will cost between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000. At this time it is impossible to give any more accurate data on the cost of the buildings because of the rapid increase in prices.

If there is anything significant in the adoption by the board and the public of this building program, it lies not so much in the amount, because other cities have done a great deal more, as it does in the fact that the proposition which was placed before the Board of Education and public received quick and favorable consideration as soon as it was presented in a definite business-like way. Every member of the Board of Education in this city is a successful business man. This is evidenced by the fact that all of them are directors in one or another of the local banks. When the president of the bank of which any member happens to be a director desires to expend a large sum of money, or when a corporation in this city desires to borrow money from that bank, approval is given only after the most careful consideration of the facts presented, and both the president of the bank and the borrower are very careful not only to prepare their statements accurately, but also to present them in a telling manner. In other words, it is a matter of salesmanship with them just as it is a matter of educational salesmanship with a superintendent every time he tries to get one of his ideas approved.

In this particular case there were two obstacles to be overcome which do not exist in the ordinary city. One is the tendency to

feel that endowment funds have provided for nearly all of the progress of the past and should continue to do so in the future. The second obstacle is that through indifference, or because through a long period of years the Board of Education has been composed of the best men of the community, the people as a whole have seldom voted at school board elections. In 1915, a new building was built at an expense of \$90,000 and the total vote was 111. In February, the same year, when the high-school project referred to above was submitted, 97 votes were cast, there being 86 in favor of the measure. A definite effort, however, was made to overcome both of these conditions.

The tables presented to the Board of Education were roughly of two types: educational and financial statistics. In all, there were ten tables prepared and a few charts. The general reader will not be particularly interested in a study of the actual tables, but merely in a statement of what the tables covered. The superintendent made a study of the school enrolment for the years 1914 to 1919 inclusive. The study when completed was placed in the hands of each member of the Board of Education. The first sheet indicated three imperative needs which arose from the study of the chart:

1. A new senior high school and junior college
2. A new junior high school
3. A new grade school

The second sheet gave in more detail suggested solutions of the problems which were raised in the study, and sheet 3 was a summary of the discussion. In other words, the board members were busy men and if they did not have time to read the report carefully, they could merely glance through it because the summary was arranged so as to be read easily.

Preceding the tables were given the definitions of the different technical terms which were used in interpreting the statistics submitted. For instance, such terms as "absolute enrolment," "net enrolment," "average number belonging," "median," "junior high school," "senior high school," "junior college," etc., were all defined because the average member of the Board of Education is not familiar with the technical use of all these terms. Care was also exercised not to introduce into the study any statistics of a highly technical nature.

The first table submitted was entitled "A Comparison of the Average Number Belonging with the School Census for the School Years 1914-19." This table was prepared to determine whether the average number belonging in the public schools was increasing as rapidly as the school census. It was found that the average number belonging increased exactly as rapidly as the school census which indicated that as the school census grew, that growth would be reflected in the public schools—an important conclusion as any school man can see.

Table II was entitled "The Relation of the Average Number Belonging to the School Census (1916-17) in Eight Michigan Cities Including Muskegon." The date 1916-17 was chosen because it was the last report of the state superintendent of public instruction. This table merely indicated that Muskegon was in the upper quartile as far as relationship between the average number belonging in the public schools and the school census was concerned, and that we were in better condition than many of the other cities of our size in the other. It simply re-enforced Table I and justified us in our conclusion that Muskegon is a city where the pupils attend the public schools. These two tables were prepared and discussed from the point of view of building for the future and the conclusion was reached that as the city grows the public schools are growing also.

Table III was entitled "A Comparison of the Senior High-School Enrolment Years 1914-19." This was important in that it indicated that there had been only a slight increase in the senior high-school enrolment and that there had been an actual decrease in the twelfth grade. This led to the study of the conditions which should bring such a peculiar situation about and seemed to argue for a different organization and for a different kind of equipment. The question then arose: If the Board of Education decides to build a senior high school, how large a building should it be and how many pupils would there be in it in five years? By using the device given by Professor Rugg for figuring rates of increase, namely the geometric mean, we found that the rate of increase over the six-year period had been 2.9 per cent and that in the five years to come, there would probably be in the senior high school alone, at this same rate of increase, 700 pupils.

Table IV was entitled "A Comparison of Junior High-School Enrolment, 1914-19." This study was made to determine the

number of pupils in the junior high-school grades in Muskegon, the increase over the six-year period, and the distribution of those pupils. As it was stated before, the point of view throughout was that of attempting to forecast future needs by a study of past growth. This study of the junior high-school enrolment showed us that we had enough junior high-school pupils for three large buildings and indicated the location in which they should be built.

Table IV indicated that the smallest increase in any one of the three years in the junior high-school period was in the seventh grade; so a study was made of the Record of Permits Issued by Attendance Department over a period of six years in an endeavor to determine whether the issuing of permits had any effect on the small increase in the seventh grade and whether the permits were increasing at such a rate as to make any material difference in our plans. It was found that the percentage of increase was so small that it would not affect any building plans which might be made.

A study was then made of Table VII, "A Comparison of School Districts." Each school in the city was discussed to determine where the largest growth was and what were the actual conditions over the six-year period in each school district. The result of this study was to convince the Board of Education that certain districts were in need of schools at once.

The question of the junior college was considered and presented in Table VIII, entitled "Muskegon High-School Graduates Attending Higher Institutions, 1914-19" in which we tried to answer the question, "Are there enough pupils for a junior college?" We decided that there were not, but that if the junior college were made a graduate school of which the college preparatory work would be only a department we would have 150 pupils available for enrolment by the time the building was completed.

Following the decision of the Board of Education to go before the people, it was necessary to prepare a study of the types of buildings, their capacity, and features which should be included. It is not necessary to go into details except to indicate that in the case of the new grade school a table was prepared which showed the number of pupils living in that district now, the rate of increase over four years, the number of pupils who could be transferred there, and showed that by September, 1920, there would be 300 pupils for the building and a year from that time there would be

approximately 350, and that in 1922 the enrolment would be slightly over 400. A statement was also presented showing the number of rooms necessary to take care of these pupils together with other desirable features and indicated that we should provide for a sixteen-room building.

The Board of Education had deliberated in a more or less perfunctory manner for about six months. When the study was presented to them, they decided as the result of two conferences to adopt the entire program without dotting an "i" or crossing a "t." The next problem was then to "sell" the matter to the people. A careful campaign was planned which included both editorial news and paid advertisements, and the usual number of talks before the people.

After careful consideration, one of the local business men's clubs was selected as the proper medium through which to launch the campaign and it was begun through that agency. In all of the speeches and interviews which followed, in fact in all of the publicity, use was continually made of the data which had been presented to the Board of Education. There was an attempt made to present the figures in as convincing a manner as possible, but there was no attempt to present anything but concrete facts.

Before presentation to the people a careful study was made of the financial aspect of the problem. This was presented as a rule by a member of the Board of Education while the educational feature was attended to by the superintendent and his assistants. On the financial side, a statement was prepared showing the endowment funds, their amount, how the demands had decreased the available endowment for other than original purposes, what other cities of the same size as Muskegon were doing without endowment funds, and endeavoring to bring home the fact that the endowment was given by Mr. Hackley primarily to provide for that type of education for young people which had not been available without the endowment. A statement was also prepared showing the assessed valuation, the outstanding bonds, the taxing power of the Board of Education which brought before the minds of the voters very clearly that Muskegon was in a very fortunate financial condition. Constant use was made of the results of a questionnaire sent to other cities, concerning their bonded indebtedness and the bonding issues which they had recently carried.

The actual number of people who registered for the election was small as compared with those who should have registered, but unfortunately for our plans the registration day was probably the worst day of November. As it was, approximately 900 people registered, which was nearly nine times as many people as had ever registered for a school-building program with the Board of Education of this city, more than twenty times as many as those who voted at the last school election.

Incidentally, in placing this matter before the people, the Board of Education felt that they were not only trying to convince them of the advisability of their building program, but that they were actually "selling" the Board of Education and its policies to the people, and that the contacts which they formed and that the interest which was created would have been worth while even if the campaign had failed. Facts convinced the Board of Education that a building program was necessary and facts presented in an intelligible manner to the people of Muskegon so convinced them of the necessity of the building program that they ratified the projects by a vote of more than fifteen to one.